

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Page 2, second full paragraph, delete in its entirety, and replace with the following new paragraph:

To protect against such a disaster, it is known to install two like network element elements in two separate rooms and connect them with one another. If one network element fails, at least part of the traffic, e.g., prioritized traffic such as emergency numbers, can still be handled by the second network element. Such a structure is shown in Fig. 1. Its disadvantages are the high capital expenditure for two complete pieces of equipment and the size of the switching matrices that are required to ensure that even with protection mechanisms such as MSP (Multiplexer Section Protection) and SNCP (Subnetwork Connection Protection), the network elements are 100% nonblocking.

Page 2, third full paragraph, delete in its entirety, and replace with the following new paragraph:

It is an object of the invention to provide a network element which requires less hardware and can be implemented at lower cost than conventional network elements and still provides at least partial protection against disasters such as fire, explosion, or inundation which destroy all equipment installed in a room. ~~This object is attained by the features of claim 1. Further advantageous aspects of the invention are apparent from the dependent claims. This object is attained by a network element for a digital communications network, comprising: a number of interface modules, a first, active switching matrix connected to the interface modules for switching paths between the interface modules, a second, redundant switching matrix also connected to the interface modules, and a controller for detecting a fault condition of the active~~

switching matrix and for switching to the redundant switching matrix, which is then used as a new active switching matrix, wherein the interface modules are divided into two groups, and each of the two switching matrices is combined with a respective one of the groups of interface modules to form two separate units, which are interconnected by internal links, whereby the units can be installed in two separate rooms.

Page 4, first full paragraph, delete in its entirety, and replace with the following new paragraph:

In the embodiment, the crossconnect has eight optical interface modules 23, 24 for the connection of optical fibers of the communications network. Each of the interface modules is connected to both switching matrices 21, 22. At the interface modules, communications signals are received from and transmitted into the communications network. These are time-division multiplex signals of the STM-N type (Synchronous Transport Module, N=1, 4, 8, 16, 64), which contain user signals to be switched. The user signals are packed in containers in accordance with a multiplex hierarchy. To switch a path in the network, individual one-ones of these containers are switched by the switching matrix from a receiving interface module to a transmitting interface module, where the containers are reassembled into a transport frame and transmitted. In the interface modules, the received communications signals are converted to electrical form and demultiplexed, and the containers of the signals are passed to both switching matrices.